NEW PUBLICATIONS.

BOOKS OF ARTISTIC CRITICISM AND BIOGRAPHY.

OF THE BEAUTY OF WOMEN. Dialogue by Messer. Agnolo Firenzuola. Translated from the Italian by Clara Bell, with an introduction by Theodore Child. Octavo, pp. xvii, 178. New-York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1893.

LIFE OF CHRISTIAN DANIEL RAUCH. Drawn from German authorities by Ednah D. Cheney. Octavo, pp. viii, 331. Boston: Lee and Shepard, 1893.

THE LIFE AND LETTERS OF WASHINGTON ALLSTON. By Jared B. Flagg, N. A. Illustrated. Royal Octavo, pp. xvii, 434. New-York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1893.

THE COLUMBUS GALLERY. By N. Ponce de Leon. Illustrated. Quarto, pp. 178. New-York: N. Ponce de Leon, 1893.

OLD SWORD PLAY. By Alfred Hutton. Illustrated. Quarto, pp. 36. New-York: B. Westermann and Company, 1893.

Agnolo Firenzuola was one of those accomplished dilettanti of the sixteenth century in whom the racy humors of their time struggled for the mastery against erudition and classicism. He could prove himself an arrant pedant. Nothing could stand, he held, before a quotation from Plato, and his work is plentifully enriched with references to antiquity and antique authors. But he was a readable novelist in an age which fashioned its standard on men like Boccaccio and the Bishop of Agen; men who, whatever their faults may have been, were certainly matchless story tellers. He held his own amongst his learned contemporaries. They praised him for the purity of his Tuscan.

Why Firenzuola's "Dialogue of the Beauty of Women" should have been translated by Miss Clara Bell, and published recently, is a question which the late Theodore Child, who wrote an introduction for the new edition, was himself moved to ask He had no difficulty in answering it satisfactorily, nor will any sympathetic reader of the gallant old Florentine's discourse. His book, for all its profusion of classical allusion, is far from being the lumber which might be expected from so inveterate an academician. He was a close and delicate observer of women, and his analysis of their charm is as fresh and convincing now as it must have been to his earliest readers. It is preserved, moreover, in a beautiful example of a beautiful literary form. A favorite device of the Italian novelists was to imagine their tales as having been told in some villa or palace where stress of weather, perhaps, had detained a party of high-bred men and women. Firenzuola had employed it in writing his novels, he knew its possibilities well, and he employed it again in constructing his dialogue on the beauty of women. He placed an embodiment of himself, one Celso, in the garden of an abbey. There he led him into the company of four ladies of Prato, Madonna Lampiada, Madonna Amororrisca, Selvaggia and Verdespina, and there under the cypresses "they tarried disputing of Madonna Amelia della Torrenuova," whom one called a beauty and another "not even well-favored." No burden of artificial culture could extinguish Firenzuola's store of shrewdness and vivacity nor could it obscure the fine quality of his artistic feeling. He carries into this dialogue the strongly human temper of his writing in fiction, but he is also, upon this occasion, the courtier and the connoisseur to his finger tips. Nothing could be more restrained, more elegant, in better taste. This monk of Vallombrosa, whose writings were more than once a scandal to the Church, is here a very Galahad among critics. Of the practical value his observations may possess for modern women it is difficult to make an estimate. Mr. Child admits that some of them are only to be fully understood when studied in connection with the pictorial memorials of the Renaissance, with the paintings of Botticelli and Mantegna. But Firenzuola's entire argument makes for a noble ideal of beauty, which is comprehensible to-day and still to be desired. Charm, grace, seemliness, majesty, are now what they always were, and Firenzuola's words on these topics have a contemporaneous ring in nineteenth century ears. "I know not what to say of majesty," says Celso, "save that it is a common use of daily speech when a lady is tall and well-shaped, carries herself well, sits with a certain grandeur, speaks with gravity, laughs with modesty, and finally diffuses, as it were, an odor of queenliness. . . . Thus by majesty we mean nothing else than the movement and carriage of a lady with a certain regal pomp." And is it not as true now as it ever was that "it is most seemly in a noble and gentle lady, as a manifestation of her happiness, to laugh with modesty, severity and candor, without much motion of her body, in a low tone, and rarely rather than often?" Great are the insight and sagacity of Firenzuola's "Dialogue." No lover of old Italian literature and life can fail to perceive the ability with which he maintains the honor of the one and the truth with which he reproduces a gracious phase of the other. The "Dialogue" is a trenchant little essay in aesthetics, and it is a charming picture of Renaissance manners.

A variant of the pseudo-classic character typified in Firenzuola is provided in the history of German plastic art by Daniel Rauch. This sculptor was of the race of the Florentine author in that he was perpetually seeking the confirmation of his ideas in classic models. With Mrs. Ednah D. Cheney, the author of a "Life of Christian Daniel Rauch," which has lately appeared, it is an article of faith that her hero combined within himself the best of ancient and modern tendencies. But everything is a matter of faith with this biographer. She will tell you in cold blood, apropos of the celebrated recumbent statue of Queen Louise, that "criticism of this beautiful work is needless"; that "it is the meeting point of the real and the ideal." As a matter of fact Rauch was a sculptor of talent who found his Waterloo, as so many other Germans of his time found theirs, in the statuary halls of the Vatican. They thought they had found their promised land there. "How unhappy were we sculptors," exclaims Rauch, "but for Greek art and its works!" Happy they were, no doubt, in their invasion of Rome, and it is true that the revival of enthusiasm for classic art in Germany was of the greatest benefit to the spread of culture within the boundaries of that country. The value of the labors of Winckelmann, Lessing and Goethe is simply incalculable. But to the group of artists at Rome, who sought to realize in the concrete the plastic ideal of antiquity, the return to that ideal assured nothing but extinction in the eye of posterity. The Italian Canova, the Swedish Thorwaldsden, the German Schadow, and Rauch were all committed by their passion for the antique to a falsely elevated level, upon which their technical limitations permitted them to produce respectable works of art, but none deserving of a better epithet than that. In the face of Thorwaldsden's lion at Lucerne, of Canova's dainty "Cupid and Psyche"; in the face of Rauch's "Queen Louise" at Charlottenburg and his "Frederick" at Berlin, it would be useless to deny any of these celebrities a certain executive power. In the face of the absolutely colorless style of their most noted works, it would be equally useless to deny the insignificance of their stations in the range of plastic art.

Rauch in his own land is famous. Outside of it he means nothing to the amateur. Sentimentalists everywhere love him for his "Queen Louise." Cool-headed critics everywhere—except at home, where they lose their self-poise—regard him as sophisticated in the antique school beyond the recovery of any national characteristics and deficient in the personal strength which might have counteracted the dulness of his classic mood. He was born in 1777, and died in 1857. His countrymen have founded a museum in his honor, and Dr. Eggers, the biographer of the sculptor, has taken five volumes in which to tell his story. Mrs. Cheney has brought the narrative within the compass of a single volume. We have no hesitation in saying that the student will find in that volume all that it is worth his while to know of Christian Daniel Rauch.

Writing of one of the Academic Roman school, of Canova, the American artist, Washington Allston, said: "I never could feel that Canova had genius. The artists were doubting his genius twenty years ago in Italy, and now few artists call him a man of genius." Precisely the same fate has overtaken Allston himself. It is the testimony of "The Life and Letters of Washington Allston," by Jared B. Flagg, N. A., that the American painter was a great man to his contemporaries. Leslie, a fellow artist in England, described one of Allston's pictures as "worthy to rank with the best works of Paul Veronese." Among Coleridge's marginalia there occurs a reference to "Washington Allston, a painter born to renew the sixteenth century." Perspective contributes much to the fixing of an artist's status. Aside from the fact that your truly great artist is never born to renew a past century, but to express the genius of his own, it is obvious that Coleridge was too close to the friend he loved next to Wordsworth, according to his own account, to judge him fairly. Allston had his vogue at one time, early in the century. It is gone now and has been gone for a long while. He was born in Charleston in 1779. In his young manhood he met with our old miniaturist, Malbone, and in his company proceeded to London. They arrived there in 1801. Reynolds and Gainsborough were both dead. Romney had only one more year in which to live. The tradition of the splendid maestria of the English school of portraiture was sustained by Lawrence alone. Much as they admired the latter, the artists then dominant in London were in no way qualified to emulate the buoyancy and distinction of his style. Benjamin West was the president of the Royal Academy. Allston fell upon the generation of that ambitious but futile painter. His time was the time of Fuseli, Haydon, Leslie and Mulready. English art has known no more barren period. Fertile enough in ideas, the school was without the power to develop them effectively on canvas. Haydon and Fuseli built up their stately compositions and failed to breathe into them the breath of life. The prevalent tone is concisely expressed in one of Allston's most important works, the "Dead Man Revived by Touching the Bones of the Prophet Elijah." This painting, which is now in the possession of the Philadelphia Academy of Fine Arts, was awarded a prize of 200 guineas by the British Institution, where it was exhibited in London. West in speaking of it added: "He (Allston) has commenced where most of us leave off." It is a rifacimento of old Italian inspirations; not a direct and literal adaptation of Italian motives, but plainly an old master of the Bolognese school at second hand, a far away echo of the Caracci whom Allston admired. The picture suited English and American taste, at a time when taste was satisfied with a conventional and extremely hollow kind of art. The taste of the present day is indifferent to Allston as a painter, except upon the rare occasions when he appears as the author of a portrait like that of Coleridge in the National Portrait Gallery, or like that of West in the Boston Museum. In these he exhibits an attractive style, though not one of especially forceful individuality, an excellent technical habit and a good deal of penetration.

Mr. Flagg's portly volume can do nothing to place Allston upon the pedestal in the Pantheon of Art which once was his beyond dispute. What it will chiefly do will be to win respect for Allston as a man, and to interest readers in his experiences as the friend of interesting men. He knew Coleridge intimately, and the long list of his acquaintance included Irving, Lamb, West, Leslie, Morse, Horatio Greenough and R. H. Dana. While the record of his intercourse with these personages does not happen to furnish many quotable paragraphs—he himself was not an epigrammatic correspondent—it abounds in evidence of the esteem in which he was held.

Mr. N. Ponce de Leon has written and has published under his own imprint an illustrated quarto on the portraits of the discoverer of America. He entitles it "The Columbus Gallery," and within the limits imposed by its 175 pages he contrives to marshal an amazing number of paintings, statues, medals and other counterfeit presentments of the navigator. Mr. De Leon includes a great deal too much in his volume, which is, by the way, very poorly made. The quantity of obscure modern portraits which he reproduces and mentions is far too large for a book of serious pretensions. The systematic review of the old portraits recognized by the critics, the Jovian, the Yanez, the Lotto and the rest, is all that the book contains which is of any interest, and the interest in that is slight.

Another recent volume of research is the handsomely published treatise, "Old Sword Play," compiled by Mr. Alfred Hutton. This brings within the reach of the modern fencer an exposition of his art as it was practised in the sixteenth, seventeenth and eighteenth centuries. Mr. Hutton offers scarcely any remarks on the general history of his subject, but devotes himself to its purely practical bearings. With the assistance of the numerous plates reproduced from Italian and French authorities, the text aims at enabling the swordsman to really profit by the experience of his predecessors. It is emphatically a work for students of fence, a lesson-book pure and simple.